

THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION


TO: ~~JEB, JGH~~

FROM: GF

DATE: June 9, 1969

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Because Saul Bellow could not stay at our offices long enough to sign the final copy, this was done as a memo rather than as a letter to JGH which he originally intended. Given that intention, I thought the original should, however, go on to JGH.



GF

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

9115  
Pandp  
Creative writing

FROM:

DATE: May 28, 1969

TO:


COMMENTS:

SUBJECT:

APR 30 1971

Suddenly called away and unable to attend the June 3 meeting, I should like to offer a few remarks about the Imaginative Writing and Literary Scholarship Program.

I understand that the future of individual grants is very uncertain and I should like to emphasize one fact, namely, that artists are individuals and that foundation support of collective enterprises only would be damaging to the artist and to American culture. Already the independent writer finds himself between the mass media on the one side and the universities on the other. The universities are rapidly assimilating poetry, fiction, painting, and sculpture; they have also taken in most of the literary magazines to which they have given an academic coloring. There is scarcely any independent ground for the contemporary American writer. He is either fabulously enriched by success or entirely neglected. The rich, having no literary culture, show small interest in poetry or the novel. There are no patrons; the publishers, having amassed great fortunes since World War II, have done little more than to create a National Book Award, of benefit primarily to a bureaucratic staff.

I think it is clear that there is no extra-institutional support for writers; the government has no interest in them. I am sure that social and racial problems, problems of health, problems of education, the problems of underdeveloped countries appear at the moment to have a clear priority. There is a danger, however, that no one will be greatly concerned with the arts. But without these, there is no civilization. We have seen what Russian and Chinese Communism have done to literature. They recognized it as politically dangerous. We, here, are gradually becoming aware of the damage a business civilization may do to the arts through indifference or ignorance. This Foundation has had an extraordinarily successful program of literary grants over the last four years. The record shows how much good has been accomplished and I strongly urge the continuation of this program.

(dictated by Saul Bellow)

May 28, 1969

Suddenly called away and unable to attend the June 3 meeting, I should like to offer a few remarks about the Imaginative Writing and Literary Scholarship Program. I understand that the future of individual grants is very uncertain and I should like to emphasize one fact, namely, that artists are individuals and that foundation support of collective enterprises only would be damaging to the artist and to American culture. Already the independent writer finds himself between the mass media on the one side and the universities on the other. The universities are rapidly assimilating poetry, fiction, painting, and sculpture, they have also taken in most of the literary magazines to which they have given an academic coloring. There is scarcely any independent ground for the contemporary American writer. He is either fabulously enriched by success or entirely neglected. The rich, having no literary culture, show small interest in poetry or the novel. There are no patrons; the publishers, having amassed great fortunes since World War II, have done little more than to create a National Book Award, of benefit primarily to a bureaucratic staff. I think it is clear that there is no extra-institutional support for writers; the government has no interest in them. I am sure that social and racial problems, problems of health, problems of education, the problems of underdeveloped countries appear at the moment to have a clear priority. There is a danger, however, that no one will be greatly concerned with the arts. But without these, there is no civilization. We have seen what Russian and Chinese Communism have done to literature. They recognized it as politically dangerous. We, here, are gradually becoming aware of the damage a business civilization may do to the arts through indifference or ignorance. This Foundation has had an extraordinarily successful program of literary grants over the last four years. The record shows how much good has been accomplished and I strongly urge the continuation of this program.

Saul Bellow